

BWC Strategy Session

Unveiling the Earth Day Toolkit

On March 2, 2006, the BWC Network held a Strategy Session to provide Network members with ideas and tools for promoting Best Workplaces for Commuters to their local media outlets through an environmental, Earth Day message. Patrice Thornton, a Best Workplaces for Commuters team member, facilitated the conversation and introduced the featured speaker: Suzette Riley, media consultant, with PRR.

Patrice Thornton

Ms. Thornton opened the discussion by explaining that the strategy session would introduce the Earth Day toolkit and that Suzette Riley would provide tips for using the Earth Day tools. EPA encourages BWC Network Members to leverage Earth Day as a way to highlight the value of commuter benefits and increase awareness about Best Workplaces for Commuters. By March 20, 2006, BWC Network members will have access to a special section on the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site with all of the Earth Day tools, including a print Public Service Announcement (PSA), a radio PSA, a template editorial, a Web banner, and “fast facts.” Ms. Thornton explained that the purpose of the discussion was to allow Network members to start developing a timeline to use the Earth Day tools. EPA encourages Network members to increase the visibility of Best Workplaces for Commuters, as well as their own organizations, by seamlessly integrating the Earth Day toolkit into their current programs.

Ms. Thornton introduced the tools offered in the Earth Day toolkit.

Print PSA

To connect the Best Workplaces for Commuters message to Earth Day, the print PSA is focused on an environmental theme. EPA is pleased to provide a template of the print PSA that can be customized for Network members if the PSA is to be placed.

Radio PSA

There are three versions of the radio PSA – 10 second, 15 second and 30 second. The radio script PSA can be used “as is” or customized by the Network Member.

Opinion Editorial

This item may be pitched as an editorial or submitted as a letter to the editor.

Online Banner

An online flash banner will be available to Network members. Ms. Thornton added that the banner may promote interest in commuter benefits and prompt potential clients to contact Network members.

Ms. Thornton summarized her introduction and stated that EPA hopes the materials are useful to all Network members and will help them spread the word about commuter benefits and the impact they have on the environment as well as the Best Workplaces for Commuters program.

Suzette Riley

Ms. Riley provided a general overview of the tactics for pitching a PSA. Ms. Riley cautioned that media outlets will generally not go out of their way to accommodate a PSA because a PSA will take space that would otherwise generate revenue. In



In addition, media outlets are no longer required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to run PSAs. However, they are encouraged to do so as a form of community service.

If the targeted media outlet does choose to run a PSA, the Network member who pitched the idea will have no control over the placing or timing of the PSA. Network members will be competing with other organizations attempting to place their own PSAs. However, Network members have an advantage since they are pitching in their own local market.

Ms. Riley provided step-by-step guidelines for pitching a PSA.

Radio and Print Public Service Announcements

1) Why and when media outlets run PSAs

Media outlets run PSAs because radio stations need to fill 24 hours of airtime every day and print media needs to fill vacant space. Print media is slightly different because, if necessary, they can simply reduce the number of pages in the publication.

2) Identifying publications and radio stations

EPA has created :15, :20, and :30 second radio PSAs, which allows radio stations more flexibility and could prove to be an advantage for pitching. News, talk radio, and community radio stations are especially good targets for pitching the Earth Day PSA. Ms. Riley pointed out that National Public Radio (NPR) will not accept PSAs because they have sponsorships. Network members may have more success pitching local stations because they have a vested interest in local events and citizens.

3) Finding the right contact

Do not contact the sales department since they are interested in selling ad space, not in placing a PSA for no charge. Try contacting the “community” department or a publisher directly. It might be helpful to first make a friendly call to the receptionist of the target media outlet. Network members should expect their calls to be passed around to several staff members before finding the right person with whom to speak.

4) Process for pitching

Persistence is the key for successfully placing a PSA. Ms. Riley advised Network members to have a plan ready and to be thoroughly prepared before ever attempting a call. Once prepared, call the media outlet to identify the best contact, then call the contact and deliver the pitch. If the best contact is not available to take your call, leave the pitch on their voicemail rather than leaving a general message about placing a PSA. In addition, when making a pitch via email, include the PSA in the first email to reduce back-and-forth time. Face-to-face meetings are often most effective because it is more difficult to say no when speaking to someone directly. However, face time is more difficult to schedule. Network members should clearly explain that the PSA must run on or before Earth Day (April 22, 2006).

5) Making your PSA relevant

Explain to your contact why readers or listeners will care about the commuter benefits message around Earth Day. Connect commuter options to current and local issues, such as rising gas prices, ground level ozone, local asthma rates, traffic congestion, and environmental statistics.





Providing local data and local employers' names will help make the Best Workplaces for Commuters message relevant.

6) **Timing**

It is important to get an early start. Call one month in advance of the target date for publication. Once the media outlet makes the decision to run the PSA, they will want the file as soon as possible. They will be able to provide the time window during which the PSA will run, but not specific days. Provide the media contact with start and end dates for running the PSA and an appropriate window to allow more opportunities for the PSA to run. The first quarter of the year is generally when publications have the most free space available and the lowest ad rates.

7) **Measuring success**

Ask the media contact to provide their readership data for the time period that the PSA ran. To track their readership, newspapers use a formula and multiply circulation by a factor that assumes a pass-on rate for each newspaper.

Radio stations are not required to track when or how often they run PSAs. Establish a relationship with the radio station contact and ask them for reports on how often the PSA was run. The best measurement of radio listeners is to ask for the average number of listeners during any given 15 minute period per day.

Opinion Editorial/Letter to the Editor

Individual newspapers provide information explaining how to submit a letter to the editor. Ms. Riley suggested having a letter to the editor signed by the organization's highest level official to increase the credibility of the message. Most newspapers will

contact the author of a letter to the editor before it is published to verify contact information.

An editorial is similar to a news story. Therefore, Ms. Riley suggested calling the media contact and making a pitch. If sending editorials to more than one newspaper, each version should be slightly different. Localize the editorial as much as possible to make it relevant to the newspaper. If possible, provide statistics or local environmental figures and local employers' names.

Open Discussion

A participant from Upper Valley Rideshare asked if she could receive a copy of the editorial. Ms. Thornton replied that she would ensure that all participants receive the materials included in the Earth Day promotional toolkit. She added that EPA recognizes that if Network members are successful with their pitches they may have different requests for materials and EPA is happy to work with them. However, EPA needs to receive these requests as early as possible to allow time for customizing the materials.

Ms. Susan Berry from Upper Valley Rideshare asked if Network members should e-mail EPA if they have text they want customized. Ms. Thornton explained that EPA can only customize the information at the bottom of the print PSA.

Ms. Berry stated that as a BWC District, Upper Valley Rideshare has a large number of employees who utilize carpooling, but there is no text in the PSA about carpooling.

Ms. Marci McGuire from Bishop Ranch remarked that she noticed the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site address on the PSA and asked if Network members could place their own Web site address and



logo in the purple box at the bottom of the PSA. She also suggested that adding carpooling to the PSA was an excellent idea and asked whether bicycling might be added as well. Ms. Thornton explained that there was a dilemma because there are more commuter benefits options than can be included in the PSA. The PSA was written to focus on commuter benefits that qualify employers as Best Workplaces for Commuters. Ms. McGuire explained that in her region, Earth Day and bicycling are tied together because Bike to Work Day is less than a month after Earth Day. Ms. Thornton agreed to discuss all comments with the designer.

A participant from Commuter Club said that she had never placed a PSA but would consider trying. She hopes that the PSA campaign will fit in with their local program. She will see how much she can push the PSA in Atlanta.

Ms. Stephanie Minker from Triangle J Council of Governments explained that she facilitates Best Workplaces for Commuters programs for her customers and the strategy session was beneficial because it is helpful to know what tools are available to her employers.

Ms. Riley explained that the Earth Day PSA is a timely, relevant, and important, and she expects pitches to be fairly successful.

Ms. Thornton reminded the participants that last year Best Workplaces for Commuters was successful in placing a full page PSA in Time, Fast Company, and Inc. magazines. Current events, such as rising gas prices and energy conservation messages, are in line with Best Workplaces for Commuter's Earth Day message, possibly compelling the media to place the PSAs.

Ms. Minker asked if she could receive a copy of the Time and Inc. PSAs in a full-page glossy copy. Ms. Thornton said that she would check and see if a copy of the PSA was available on the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site and agreed that PSAs are a good recruiting tool to share with potential clients.

Ms. Thornton reminded the participants that there would be a summary of the strategy session posted on the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site at <www.bwc.gov> within a week because of the time-sensitive nature of the Earth Day Promotional Toolkit. She said that she would email all of the participants once the summary and all of the tools had been posted on the Web site. She stated that she would consider comments about carpooling and biking and would discuss them with the Best Workplaces for Commuters team. Participants are encouraged to begin pitching and should use the copy of the PSA that had been provided to them.

Ms. Riley agreed that it is great to start pitching early.

Closing

Ms. Thornton closed the strategy session by acknowledging the work involved in pitching PSAs. She also asked the participants to keep EPA informed when they successfully place PSAs. She explained that placing PSAs can be included in 2006 Race to Excellence applications and even if they are not successful, the pitches will still be reviewed for the Race to Excellence. Ms. Thornton ended the call by thanking the participants for their time.

